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ABSTRACT

A survey by the U.S. Conference of Mayors of its 22 member Task Force on Joblessness on Hunger to determine the current status of hunger in cities revealed the following facts among others: (1) Despite 15 months of economic recovery, the problem of hunger has grown and is expected to increase over the next year; (2) Two-thirds of the cities reported an increase in emergency food facilities; (3) In 70% of the cities, emergency food facilities are unable to meet the demand; (4) The main problem appears to be inadequate supplies of food; (5) The number of families and children requesting emergency food during the last year has increased, on average 35%; (6) Several cities report special problems with elderly or disabled citizens who are unable to come to emergency food centers; and (7) Several cities expressed particular concern over long-term nutrition problems for children. The Conference of Mayors recommends continuation and increase in Federal programs such as food stamps, child nutrition, and WIC (women, infants and children nutrition program) in order to combat this increasing problem of hunger in the city. Included is a chart showing responses from the 21 cities surveyed. (CG)

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UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS
1620 EYE STREET, NORTHWEST
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006
TELEPHONE: (202) 293-7330

THE STATUS OF HUNGER IN CITIES

APRIL, 1985

TASK FORCE ON JOBLESSNESS AND HUNGER
MAYOR RAYMOND L. FLYNN
CHAIRMAN

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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At the request of Rep. Leon Panetta, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Domestic Marketing, Consumer Relations & Nutrition of the House Agriculture Committee, the U.S. Conference of Mayors surveyed the 22 members of its Task Force on Joblessness and Hunger to determine the current status of hunger in cities. All but one of the Task Force cities was able to respond.

After fifteen months of general economic recovery, the problem of hunger in the Task Force cities has continued to grow, and is expected to increase further over the next year. Every city save one reports that the demand for emergency food assistance has increased over the last year, and 81 percent of the cities expect it will continue to grow during the next year. Clearly many people have not benefited from what now appears to be a very selective economic recovery.

As an indicator of increased demand for emergency food, two-thirds of the cities report that there are now more emergency food facilities -- that is soup kitchens, food pantries or shelters which serve free meals -- than there were one year ago. The number of facilities has increased by 21 percent in the Task Force cities. Boston has seen a 54 percent increase in the number of food pantries since 1983.

While the creation of these additional facilities shows the extraordinary effort being made in cities to meet the demand for emergency food, in many cities it is still not possible to keep pace. In 70 percent of the cities, emergency food facilities are unable to meet the demand. On average 24 percent -- nearly one-fourth -- of the emergency demand goes unmet. Over six out of ten cities are forced to turn people away.

The main problem in these cities appears to be inadequate supplies of food. Boston, Chicago, Cleveland, Louisville, Nashville, New York City, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Seattle, and Washington D.C. all lack adequate supplies of food. In several of the cities, food pantries cannot open every day because they run out of food. In Boston most pantries are able to provide only a three-day supply of food each month to a family in need, even though that family may have to wait two weeks for food stamps. Cleveland officials say that the largest facility, the Hunger Task Force of the Greater Cleveland Interchurch Council, can give just one bag of groceries to a family every two months -- sometimes every three months. They suggest that more surplus commodities be made available. Chicago reports that the demand at food pantries always goes up toward the end of the month, when food stamps run out.

Saint Paul officials are concerned because, while emergency facilities in the city do have sufficient quantities of food, there is a problem with quality. The facilities provide whatever food is available, but cannot provide a nutritious diet. Last year, Minnesota Food Share raised $200,000 which was used to supplement existing stores with nutritious foods that would

balance a family's diet. This year they could raise only $20,000. In Washington D.C. several providers in the USDA surplus commodities program say that a greater variety of foods, including canned meats and vegetables and peanut butter, should be available for distribution through the food pantries. Such an effort, they say, would encourage the recipients of commodities to prepare and eat more nutritious meals.

All of the cities save one report that the number of families and children requesting emergency food assistance during the last year has increased, on average by 35 percent. On average in the Task Force cities, 70 percent of the recipients of emergency food assistance are families and children and 30 percent are single adults.

Several cities report particular problems with elderly and disabled people who are unable to come to emergency food assistance facilities. Chicago has a two year waiting list for home delivered meals. Only five percent of the low income elderly in Chicago are served through the senior meals programs. Philadelphia says more attention must be given to getting food to the senior citizens and disabled people who cannot get themselves to the food.

Several cities also express special concerns regarding children. Chicago officials say that many children are risking prolonged malnutrition. Cook County Hospital has seen increasing numbers of malnourished children, more cases of dehydration, and a 20 percent increase in children with low growth rates. Only 41 percent of the caseload eligible for the Women, Infants and Children Program can be served in Chicago. While Catholic Charities has instituted a similar program, it is small and cannot fill the gap. Salt Lake City officials can verify that children in the school lunch program do not get a full meal over the weekend, when school is not in session. They suggest that weekend meals or food packages to take home would help.

The growing problems of hunger that this data clearly shows are most disturbing to the Conference of Mayors. Not only have these problems, which were initially attributed to the recession, not gone away, but they have increased. This must be kept in mind as Congress considers the reauthorization of the food stamp program, surplus commodities distribution and other domestic food assistance programs.

Conference of Mayors' Recommendations

The fundamental federal food assistance programs -- food stamps, child nutrition and WIC -- enable many American citizens to acquire and maintain a minimally adequate diet and, until recently, together made significant progress in reducing hunger and malnutrition in this nation. The new data contained in this report confirms what has been known for a long time: The magnitude of the problem is much greater than the resources available. Only the federal government has sufficient resources to meet the needs that exist. These programs are the most efficient way to address the needs and should be funded at adequate levels.

The Comprehensive Nutrition Assistance Act of 1985, which has been introduced in the House would go a long way toward responding to the problems of hunger which too many American citizens face:

- Many people who need food stamps or other forms of assistance are apparently not eligible for them or do not know how to get them.

- Many of those who do get food stamps are unable to purchase sufficient food for themselves and their families; the food stamp benefit together with any other income available for food is simply not enough.

In the food stamp program, provisions which would increase the earned income deduction, separate and increase shelter and dependent care deductions and revise the elderly medical deduction would help benefit levels to be more responsive to a household's other expenses. Increasing the financial resources deduction will make the program more sensitive to the inflation of the last several years. Basing the benefit levels on actual food prices, rather than a certain percentage of the Thrifty Food Plan, will help to make benefit levels more responsive to food costs. Automatic eligibility for all AFDC and SSI recipients will help to simplify administration and assure that these people, who clearly are eligible, are able to receive food stamps.

In the area of child nutrition, the WIC program should be expanded so that the caseload is increased by 250,000 per year and the U.S. Department of Agriculture should be required to distribute money evenly throughout the year. For the school lunch and breakfast programs, the income standard of eligibility should be raised to 195 percent of poverty, the cost of reduced price lunch and breakfast programs should be lowered, the reimbursement for the breakfast program should be increased, and AFDC and food stamp household members should be automatically eligible. A total of three meals and two snacks should be available through the Child Care Food Program. The eligibility of private non-profit sponsors should be restored in the Summer Food Service Program. The budget proposals to cut these programs will only take food away from children in need and should be strongly opposed.

Clearly the distribution of surplus commodities should be continued and expanded and efforts should be made to broaden the selection of foods available. In addition the Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program, through which some of the costs of distributing surplus commodities are reimbursed, should be continued and expanded.

Finally, the emergency food and shelter program operated by the Federal Emergency Management Administration through the National Board of Voluntary Agencies must be continued. With its current appropriation of $70 million the program will run through July of this year. Since it began in 1983 it has provided a total of 26.5 million additional nights of shelter and 129.8 million additional meals through appropriations which totaled $160 million. As this new data on hunger shows, the emergency still exists. Federal help is clearly needed to respond to it.

UNITED STATES CONFERENCE OF MAYORS
1620 EYE STREET, NORTHWEST
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20006
TELEPHONE: (202) 293-7330

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U.S. CONFERENCE OF MAYORS
TASK FORCE ON JOBLESSNESS AND HUNGER
STATUS REPORT ON HUNGER
RESPONSES FROM TWENTY-ONE CITIES
APRIL, 1985

City	Over the last year the demand for emergency food assistance	Over the next year the demand for emergency food assistance is expected to	Are there more emergency food assistance facilities in your city now than there were one year ago?	The percentage by which emergency food assistance facilities has increased is	Are emergency food assistance facilities able to meet the demand?	The percent of need that goes unmet is	Do emergency food assistance facilities in your city turn away people in need?	The percentage of recipients of emergency food assistance who are families and children is	The percentage of recipients of emergency food assistance who are single adults is?	Have the number of families and children requesting assistance increased?	The percentage increase of families and children requesting assistance is
								10 (soup kitchens)	90 (soup kitchens)		
Boston	Increased	Increase	Yes	54	No	30-40	Yes	80 (pantries)	20 (pantries)	Yes	80-85
Charleston	Increased	Increase	No	—	NA	NA	No	NA	NA	Yes	10
Chicago	Increased	Stay the same	Yes	NA	No	NA	Yes	80	20	No	NA
Cleveland	Increased	Stay the same	No	--	No	10	Yes	60	40	Yes	NA
Denver	Increased	Increase	Yes	40	No	40-45	Yes	70	30	Yes	40-45
Detroit	Increased	Stay the same	Yes	NA	Yes	NA	No	80	20	Yes	NA
East Orange	Decreased	Stay the same	No	—	Yes	—	No	50	50	Yes	5
Hartford	Increased	Increase	Yes	10	Yes	—	No	50	50	Yes	10
Kansas City	Increased	Increase	Yes	5	No	30	Yes	90	10	Yes	100
Louisville	Increased	Increase	Yes	15-20	No	NA	Yes	65	35	Yes	NA
Nashville	Increased	Increase	Yes	NA	No	NA	Yes	NA	NA	Yes	NA
New Orleans	Increased	Increase	No	--	Yes	—	No	85	15	Yes	53
New York City	Increased	Increase	Yes	10	No	NA	Yes	50	50	Yes	20
Philadelphia	Increased	Increase	Yes	15	No	10	Yes	75	25	Yes	15
Saint Paul	Increased	Increase	No	—	Yes	—	No	78	22	NA	NA
Salt Lake City	Increased	Increase	Yes	20	No	20	No	75	25	Yes	15-20
San Antonio	Increased	Increase	No	—	Yes	10	No	80	20	Yes	7
San Francisco	Increased	Increase	Yes	25	No	15	Yes	80	20	Yes	45
San Juan	Increased	Increase	No	—	No	50	Yes	95	5	Yes	50
Seattle	Increased	Increase	Yes	10-20	No	20	Yes	70	30	Yes	10
Washington, DC	Increased	Increase	Yes	20	No	NA	Yes	NA	NA	Yes	NA